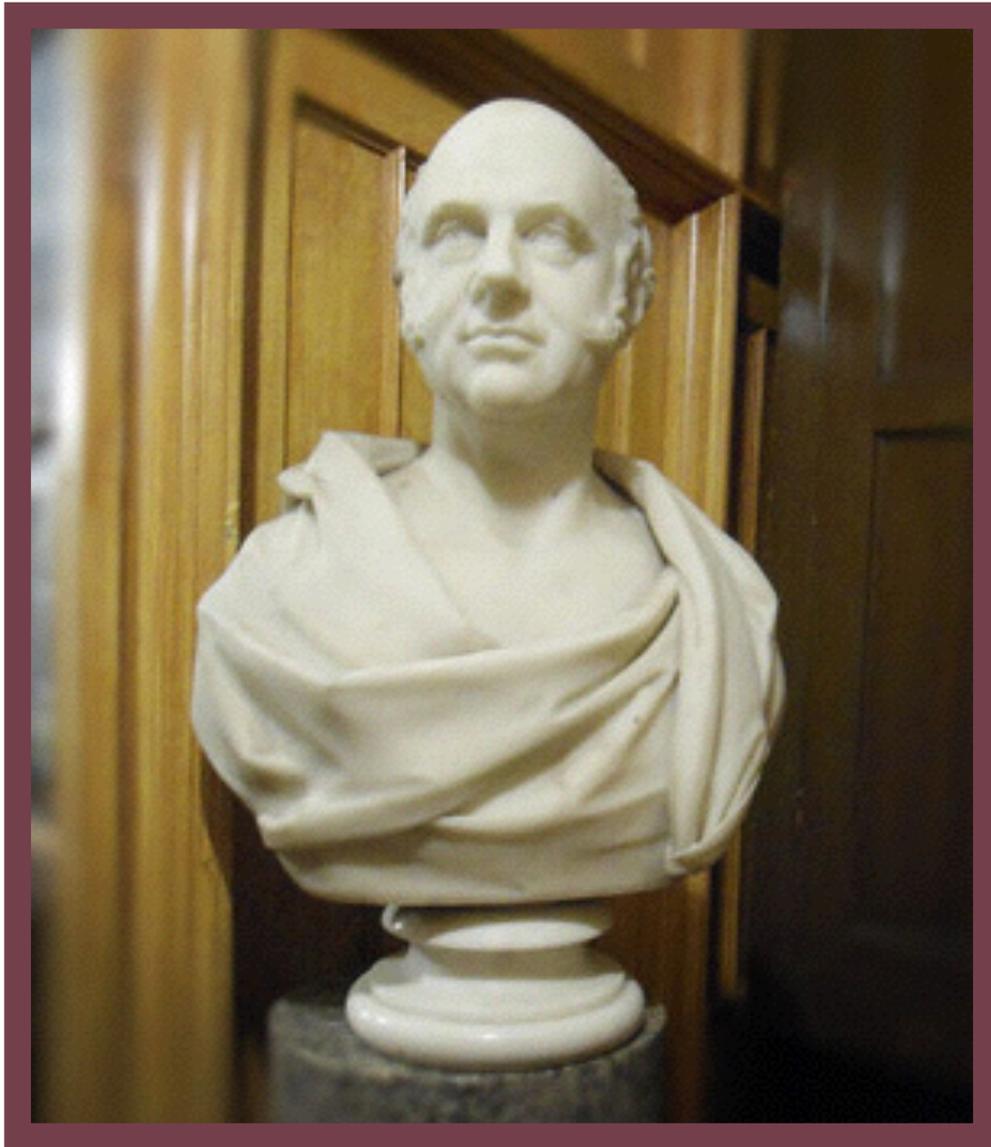


TAVISTOCK SUBSCRIPTION LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



MARBLE BUST IN LOBBY OF JOHN, 6TH DUKE OF BEDFORD

WINTER 2015/2016

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We have been reaching out a little more than usual these last six months, through other organisations and directly to local residents. Despite his many other commitments, our Secretary, Simon Dell, now represents us on the THI (Tavistock Heritage Initiative) forum, which among its projects includes the regeneration of several of our neighbouring buildings, the former Police Station, the old Magistrates Court and Guildhall Square itself. Any improvements here will undoubtedly have an impact on the Library.

Simon also represents us at meetings of TASS, Tavistock Area Support Services.

Originally we thought our involvement would extend only to the occasional hire of their mini-bus and driver to take us on excursions to our counterparts in the Association of Independent Libraries in Exeter, Penzance etc. Since then, TASS has presented us with copies of the first books in their *Life Stories* project, we have been represented at their AGM, and members of their committee have been enthusiastic about publicising what we have to offer to their own users. With this in mind, Simon has prepared a superb poster which will soon be on display in their lounge area, together with a supply of our membership forms!



In 2015, for the first time since its inception, we have sent a representative, our Membership Secretary, Juliet Hill, to the AGM of the Tavistock BID (Business Improvement District). Of course we are not a “business”, but we pay a compulsory annual levy to this body, along with all occupiers of town-centre premises assessed for non-domestic rates. We have applied (unsuccessfully) for exemption in the past, but now are grateful to Juliet for attending, making our presence in the town known and looking out for any mutually advantageous outcomes

Meanwhile Dr Annie Pulsford has been busy on our behalf, writing articles on the history of the Subscription Library and on the weather records started in the 19th century by our librarian William Merrifield. These articles, in the popular monthly *Tavistock Diary* magazine, distributed free throughout the town and area, will help make our existence known to a wide readership. In November, Annie delivered her long-awaited illustrated

talk on the library to a huge audience at the Wharf – in its popular series of Monday afternoon tea-time talks. Annie emphasised the library’s contribution to the town’s heritage, describing it as a “hidden treasure”, detailing the buildings it has occupied, and the significance of its founders and the individuals who have been attached to it over the past two hundred years. We are delighted that three town councillors (Cllr Harry Smith, Cllr Paul Williamson, Cllr Tim Gibbins) accepted invitations to attend as our guests. Afterwards more than twenty of those present asked for membership details, and we hope this will result in a significant increase in the number of subscribers this year.

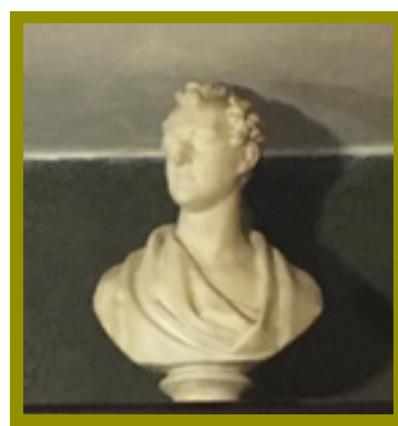
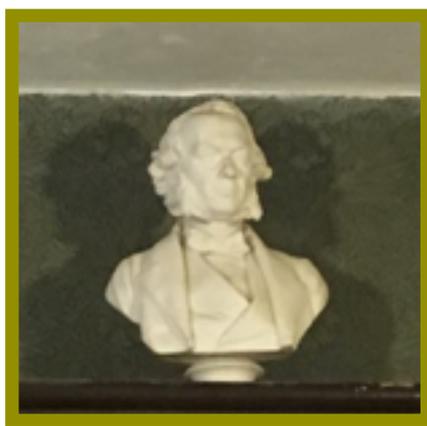
THANKS TO GRAHAM KIRKPATRICK



We are grateful to Graham and Brenda for the beautifully framed captions which now hang below the portraits of our four founders.

Graham has finally solved a mystery for us! After various attributions by visitors over the years, which now turn out to have been largely unfounded guesswork, Graham has secured identification from no less than the National Portrait Gallery that the three porcelain busts on top of the bookcase are **Sir Walter**

Scott (on the left), **Richard Cobden** (economist & politician, centre) and **Lord Byron** (right).



They date from about 1823. A fourth bust, of founder member John Taylor, once existed, presented to the Library by the then M.P. John Rundle, but it was toppled some 50 years later and smashed beyond repair.

Graham has also given us a copy of Buck's 1785 engraving *West View of Tavistock Abbey*, together with a typescript of the original dedication and history accompanying it.

THANKS TO SIMON DELL

Simon has cleverly computer-enhanced poor copies of William Merrifield's 1865 photos of his Librarian's Cottage, to show as clearly as possible the design of the cast-iron railings. Originally installed in front of the "Propylaeum" in 1822, the railings, gate and stone blocks on which they stood were removed when it was demolished, and re-erected outside the new library premises at Court Gate when it opened in 1831.

The stone blocks are still in place, but the railings and gate were confiscated and melted down as part of the national drive to collect metal during the Second World War. Much of this, including most of the cooking-pots handed over by the general public, proved to be unsuitable and was quietly dumped.

Until now the only evidence for the design of the iron-work was the oil painting by an unknown artist which hangs in the reading room, in which the railings are rather indistinct. A drawing from it was made in 1946 by Victor Gregory (Headmaster of the primary School in Plymouth Road) to illustrate an article on the library by Eric Kingdon in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*. Recent colour photographs of the original painting, also computer-enhanced, give a good general impression of the railings but are not as clear as could be desired.

The latest enhancements of Merrifield's actual photographs of the railings, combined with measurements and calculations from the holes in the stones where they were fixed, are therefore the most reliable indication of their design – more accurate than the oil painting or the drawing and photographs taken from it.

Brian Fyfield Shayler (Chairman)

HONORARY SECRETARY'S NOTES



2015 has proved to be a really busy and enjoyable year with the Subscription Library Website continuing to be built and improved. We now have members' articles online, so if anyone fancies putting pen to paper or finger to keyboard preferably then we would welcome any features to be included.

Reviews of donated books are also starting to be featured. We would

welcome anyone who might like to review a book for us to put their hand up! Do please drop me an email if you feel you would like to join the team of reviewers and we would gratefully accept your offer.

Several visits this year have really been well received, so we would welcome any ideas about where you might enjoy travelling for a visit in 2016 with fellow members. They have proved to be great social occasions.

2016 is also proving to be an interesting year in so far as our neighbours in the Guildhall and Museum are concerned with plans afoot for the development of the Guildhall complex in connection with the Heritage Lottery and World Heritage Status issues. So some exiting things happening on our doorstep! It doesn't specifically involve the Library but as we are close neighbours and share the square then our opinion is being considered about plans which is welcome. It's important to have a voice on your behalf.

If anyone is also a member of other organisations around the town and West Devon which you feel might welcome some membership forms then do please ask for some to take along to your various groups to promote the library.

As always Simon Dell Hon Sec can be contacted on simondell1958@yahoo.co.uk
or 07845 1768

LIBRARIAN'S NOTES



During 2015 we have been very fortunate that a wide variety of books have been kindly donated to the Library by various members. These have been catalogued and displayed on the book case before being shelved to make room for further books.

The Library funds have allowed purchases of current books also the rebinding and tooling of those which needed repair.

I wish to thank Gerry Woodcock for his continuing contributions of 'Tavistock Yesterdays' and Mary Freeman for 'The Devon Historian'. This keeps our collection up to date.

The list of all the new additions to the Library will be displayed behind the Lectern.

Thank you to all those who have been so generous in contributing books to the Library furthering our knowledge of the skills customs, history and sorties of Dartmoor and the surrounding area.

Josie Gerhold

A WORD FROM THE TREASURER



Although the final accounts for 2015 will show a deficit for the year the Library still maintains healthy reserves for the future. The Committee authorised expenditure on a number of items to improve member's use of the Library including a new computer. A number of older books were repaired and a few new books were purchased.

The Committee agreed that the members annual subscriptions for 2016 should be reduced to £10 for single membership and £15 for a couple.

Bill Lane

EDITOR'S NOTES

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2016



Subscriptions for 2016 are now due but you will be delighted to know that these have been reduced to £10 for a single membership and £15 for joint/family membership. I will enclose an application with this newsletter and do hope that members will rejoin and let me have their cheques payable to "The Tavistock Subscription Library" and addressed to

The Membership Secretary.
Tavistock Subscription Library
Court Gate, Guildhall Square,
Tavistock, Devon. PL19 0AE

If you have already filled in a gift aid form you do not have to do so again.

The marble bust in the lobby, featured on the front cover, is of course of our patron John, 6th Duke of Bedford.

MISCELLANEOUS

CHICKS Santa Run

Over 460 Father Christmases, children and parents made a brilliant show of scarlet hats, coats and trousers in Guildhall Square on Saturday 5th December. Fortunately there was no rain though its was a very dull afternoon.

The Subscription Library was used as the base for picking up their 'uniforms'. This was manned by members of CHICKS, the charity that arranged holidays for disadvantaged Children and members of the Rotary Club who arranged, with a party of Royal Marines, a walk/run through the Meadows and games.

For almost an hour the Library was a hive of activity as 'Santas' registered and their regalia, in various sizes, was distributed from several large cardboard boxes.

The Library made available tea, coffee and biscuits to the enthusiastic helpers.

A good time was had by all.

Graham Kirkpatrick

VISIT TO THE ATHENAEUM, PLYMOUTH



Brian Talking to Roy Alphey in the Plymouth Athenaeum Lounge

Thanks to Simon for a beautifully arranged visit to Plymouth's Athenaeum on Wednesday 4th November, though sadly due to a family bereavement he was unable to take part on the day.

Five of us attended, with Juliet kindly collecting and driving Lisabeth Greeves, Josie Gerhold and Brian F-S, managing to park right beside the entrance in the single disabled spot,

reserved for us by Athenaeum administrator Wendy, while our Sharon Hedges braved the journey there and back by bus.

We are grateful to Roy Alphey (Vice-President), Sheila and Richard Wilcockson for a great welcome, for showing us around (including places such as the Archive storage not usually open even to members), for giving us an account of its history and for answering all our questions. Founded in 1812 (thirteen years after us in Tavistock) the new Plymouth institution soon moved into premises custom-designed by John Foulston in the Greek style, hence its name *The Athenaeum*.

In the 1820s Foulston came to Tavistock, commissioned by the Duke of Bedford to restore (or perhaps more accurately to rebuild) our mediaeval Court Gate, and later an



Foulston drawing of the Tavistock Ballroom

eastern extension to accommodate our library and librarian's cottage into which we moved in 1831 after the demolition of our own "*Propylaeum*", a credible imitation of Plymouth's Athenaeum by local builder James Colling. Foulston was also responsible for our Police Station and the new ballroom at the Bedford Hotel (converted into extra bedrooms on two floors a hundred years later in the 1930s).

Sheila went to a lot of trouble to hunt out Foulston's Tavistock drawings for us to see, and Brian has since copied material from our library for Roy, who is an expert on Foulston's life and work.

Brian was also pleased to find answers to some of his enquiries about another Plymouth-based architect in whom he is interested, Arthur Southcombe Parker, who in the 1890s added a library extension to Foulston's original Athenaeum, and was later responsible for several important buildings in Tavistock, including premises for the *Tavistock Gazette & Printing Company* (now Kingdon House).

Sadly we heard how the original Athenaeum and most of its contents were destroyed in the blitz, though we are proud that some of its finest treasures were saved by being

brought to Tavistock and stored for the duration of the war in our own Subscription Library (which at that time still occupied the rooms above Court Gate and the ground and first floor rooms alongside). The present Athenaeum was built in the 1960s on the same site as the original, in the modern post-war style adopted for most of the city centre.

The Plymouth Athenaeum Library

